

**Information Resources Council  
Minutes of March 25, 2005**

**Attendees:** Ruth Copans, Jordana Dym, Elizabeth Katzman, David Hamilton, Cynthia Cramsie, Tina Levith, Gerry Schorin, Andy Camp, Susan Zappen, Joanne Devine, Sarah Goodwin, Kris Szymborsky, Justin Sipher, Tom O'Connell, Ann Henderson, Stanley McGaughey, Beth Du Pont, Michael West, Kelly Dempsey-Little, Paul Dwyer, and Andy Ashton.

**Business:**

The minutes of March 4, 2005 were approved as submitted.

Next meeting will be April 1, 2005 with the topic of electronic portfolios. (Ruth scribes)

The April 22 meeting has yet to be determined. Sarah will not be in attendance. We are open to topic suggestions, or not having the meeting.

**Topic:**

The subject of the meeting was the Net Generation: how do our students today live with information technology? How does their technology-rich (or -poor?) way of life effect their experience of the classroom and their course work? More to the point: should we be shaping our uses of instructional technology in response to what we know, or should know, about our students' IT habits?

**Discussion Notes:**

Sarah opened the discussion by making reference to *Phaedrus*, by Plato, in which Socrates suggests that with the advent of writing, people may lose their memories. In other words, technology is changing how people think, perceive, and use their minds. Prior to the meeting, two chapters from an Educause electronic book (*Educating the Net Gen*) were distributed to the community. In an earlier IRC meeting, David spoke passionately in regards to our current student population and their immersion in a number of technologies. Sarah referred to this reading as a good way to provoke further conversation on this issue. A lively conversation ensued, and unfortunately, as the discussion "heated up" we ran out of time to continue. What follows is a summary of the comments and discussion.

- Knowledge was internal until writing. With the written word, knowledge became external.
- Do faculty remind students that all resources are not equally trustworthy? The Internet is a great place for information, but also a great place for disinformation. (The Wikipedia was brought up as an example.) It was proposed that some students get confused regarding the source of articles retrieved from jstor. The library faculty commented that jstor documents should be regarded as library holdings. Electronic publishing is making the process of providing information more democratic with traditional hierarchies becoming fuzzy.
- The more authoritative the source, the more difficult it may be for students to locate. They may not be willing to take the time to find these articles, and it's easier (more convenient) for them to do a Google search of Wikipedia.
- Some attendees feel this is "a culture we have to adjust to."
- In response to the discussion of the Net Gen student culture, some posed the question, "How much do we cater to this?" "What skills do we consider important?" "How do we teach them (students) patience?" Students still borrow a large number of books from the library. "What are they doing with them?"
- We value a certain model of learning. Students may not value that same model. There are those who feel some students do value traditional models of learning.

- “The culture issue is huge.” Many students thrive on instant messaging and multitasking is the norm. Learning for them is no longer just a linear progression. This generation is not just textual, but used to multidimensional learning. “We can’t insist it (material) needs to be taught one way.”
- Students value face-to-face contact, but communication is also welcomed online.
- There was much discussion about our students and reading. “How much can we expect students to read?” We don’t have a clear sense of how much students are actually reading. There is too much to read. Should we expect them to read the whole work cover to cover? (Slow and deep reading) Or do we encourage them to skim for key information? “Students need to be able to shift gears quickly,” and weed out key information. It seems to depend on the subject and the goal of the exercise. Some faculty feel that we need to hold students accountable for reading assignments in class, or they will quickly learn they don’t have to do the reading.
- Students and others don’t tend to care about the minutia of how technology works. They put together building blocks to generate outcomes.
- Is what we’re asking students to do appropriate with how they learn? It depends on what your goal is.
- Many use technology as an “adjunct brain.” Information is easily at our fingertips and we don’t have to carry as much around in our heads.
- The Web affects how students operate and think. The lack of source credibility makes it hard for students to interpret material. The role of the faculty is to help, challenge and make sense of the information they find.
- Students have strong opinions, but not always a strong connection between the opinion and factual knowledge. “We should err on the side of caution.”
- What are our responsibilities in nurturing engagement among our students? How do we encourage them to engage? In the four years we have them, how do we use this time to make a significant impact on them? How do we engage them enough in this time for them to take the next step?
- We can’t insist students learn from one model. We have to provide a variety of models. If we dismiss their way of learning, we risk them shutting down.
- Faculty have to entertain to a certain degree and teach students to pay critical attention. This can exist in diverse approaches to teaching technologies. “Getting attention in the first place is crucial.” We need to try and refrain from moral judgments regarding the approach.
- In regards to culture, we also should keep in mind that students are often on medications to help focus their attention.
- Be open to learning from students about the technologies they are using.
- If we want students to be more deeply engaged, available technologies provide multiple avenues.
- Students need to learn “fundamental mental disciplines”. How can we use these often distracting technologies to still teach the fundamentals?
- How do we institutionalize engagement approaches?
- “A good teacher engages.” If you go to where that student is, the student is more likely to engage with you.
- Electronic tools like discussion boards can get students who are not comfortable speaking up in class to have an outlet for sharing their thoughts.
- We need to encourage faculty to start trying out the tools students use. How do we encourage this? Faculty need to understand the technologies to know how and when to apply them.
- It was suggested we get more faculty involved in this discussion by including the topic in a pedagogy workshop next fall.